

Educational System

In the time of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ)

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Close investigation of the social conditions of Arabia, especially of Makka, just before Islam, leads inevitably to the conclusion that the Arabs of that time were gifted with extraordinary talents. This alone was responsible for the fact that when the Islamic teachings polished them, the Arabs astonished the world with their originality and potentiality, and when their energies were concentrated and strengthened by the religion of unity and action, Islam, they defied the whole world and were able to wage war simultaneously against the then two world powers of Ctesiphon (Iran) and Byzantium.

The internecine feuds of the days of the *Jahiliyah* (ignorance) formed in Arabs adventurous characters of remarkable endurance and other high qualities which achieved conquests even to the envy of Napoleon.¹ The developed system of periodical fairs and well-organized escorts of caravans brought the whole of the Arabian Peninsula into an economic federation, infusing in the Arab mind the consciousness of unity

¹ Memorial de Sainte Helens, XII, 153.

which paved the way for political unity under Islam. Again, the highly developed constitution of the City State of Makka was responsible for training men to conduct the affairs of a world empire.²

The fact is that it was due to the literary talents of pre-Islamic Arabia that during the first centuries of Islam the Arabs were able to produce in Arabic such a rich and marvellous harvest in letters and sciences. To polish these talents, to awaken their latent qualities, and to exploit them usefully, this however goes to the credit of Islam.

What better background can there be for the educational system of the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) than a description of the literary conditions in the country at the dawn of Islam?

❖ Education in Pre-Islamic Arabia

Unfortunately we do not possess sufficient records regarding educational matters in the *Jahiliyah*. This is due partly to the fact that the art of writing was not much in vogue there in those days, and partly to the wanton destruction of millions of literary monuments by Halaku and others in Baghdad, Cordova and elsewhere before the invention of the printing press. In spite of this, a reconstructed picture by the help of what little and scanty material came down to posterity in the 14th century of the *Hijrah* is sufficient to astonish us and exact tribute of admiration for the

² "The City State of Makka" Islamic Culture. Vol. XII, No. 3.

race which took pride in illiteracy.³

Let us take their language first. It was once considered that a language grows rich in vocabulary, expressions and idioms in the days of its golden age; and that its previous conditions are nothing more than a mirror of unimaginative and simple ideas not much superior to animal life. Judging from this criterion the Arabic language at the dawn of Islam, we are bewildered at the refinement of the language, richness of vocabulary, fixedness of grammatical rules and fastness of poetical literature of a high standard, so much so that it is the diction of the *Jahiliyah* and not of the literary golden age of Islam which is considered as the classical and standard diction. If we compare two authors of some modern language, German, Russian, French or English, one author of today and one from ten centuries ago, their language will be so different that these writers of the same language would not be able to understand each other. Yet the vocabulary and the grammar of the language of *Imra ul Qais* is exactly the same as that of *Shawqiyy* and *Hafiz* of modern Egypt. The Qur'an and the records of the utterances of the Prophet and his companions (hadith) written in the language of *Jahiliyah*, uninfluenced by the later culture of the Arab empire and intelligible to the *Beduins* of pre-Islamic Arabia, is not the less intelligible to the student of modern Arabic. Already at that time the Arabic language was so rich that it can compare favourably with the developed languages of modern Europe. I need not dilate on the details which are known to every Arabist; I simply want to emphasize that the wonderful language of the pre-Islamic Arabs could not obviously have reached this stage of

³ A tradition runs (كتاب مختصر جامع بيان العلم) انا امة امية لا نكتب ولا نحسب by Ibn Abdul Barr, p. 35.

maturity and extensiveness without great literary activities and talents of the people who spoke it.

Apart from the very large number of poems ascribed to the *Jahiliyah*, we possess verbatim records of a good many orations, sermons, proverbs, anecdotes, oracles, arbitral awards and other prose monuments. They will convince any reader of their rhetoric, minute observation, wit and fine taste.

Even the very word Arab is significant as it means “one who speaks clearly” as opposed to all the non-Arabs *Ajam* or dumb.

These are inferences and observations of the present writer. There are direct notices also in history.

As for schools, who would believe that there were regular veritable schools attended by boys as well as by girls? Yet *Ibn Qutaibah* assures us in his ‘Uyunul-Akhbar iv, 103 (*cf. Amthal of al-Maidaniy* ii, 60) that Zilmah, the notorious harlot of the tribe of *Hudhail*, when in her childhood, attended school and used to amuse herself with pens and inkpots. The fact is interesting inasmuch as it shows that, at least in the tribe of *Hudhail*, who were kinsmen of the *Quraish* and lived not far from *Makka*, children of both sexes used to go to schools, however crude and primitive in form these might have been.

Again, in the words of an enthusiast, the fair of *Ukaz* was nothing less than the annual gathering of a Pan-Arab Literary Congress. It has caught the imagination of historians and other Arab writers from very early days and Professor Ahmad Amin of the University of Egypt contributed an interesting article on the subject to the journal of his college. Here I have no

space for the details except to refer to this Institution which has played such a conspicuous part in standardizing the Arabic language.

Ghailan ibn Salamah of the tribe of Thaqif is reputed⁴ to have been used to hold once a week a literary gathering where poems were recited and literary discussions and criticisms took place. On other days of the week he presided over the tribunal and administered justice and did other things. This is sure testimony of the high literary taste of his co-citizens of Taif in the *Jahiliyah*.

The literary activity of the city of Makka at that time seems to be of still higher standard. The seven *Mu'allaqat* were hung in the Ka'ba, the sanctuary of this city, and it was this approval which has immortalized those seven poems in the Arabic literature.

Waraqah ibn Nawfal was a Makkan. He translated in the *Jahiliyah* the Old and the New Testaments into Arabic.

Apparently, it was the people of Makka who first made Arabic a written language.⁵ And perhaps it is owing to this fact that even the uncouth privates of the army of this city were to a considerable extent literate.⁶

Story writing and fiction, that important branch of prose literature, was much cultivated in Makka as also in other parts of

⁴ *الازمنه والامكنه* by Al-Marzuqiy, II, pp. 70-80 *كتاب المعارف* by Ibn Qutaibah in loco.

⁵ *الفهرسة* by Ibn Nadim, p. 7 Cf. *Fragment of كتاب الخراج* by Qadamah published in Oxford.

⁶ See infra.

Arabia, and during the nights of full moon people assembled in their family clubs or the municipal hall, where professionals and others recited extempore night tales (*masamarah*).⁷

Literary taste does not seem to have been cultivated by pagan Arabs only. We possess the diwans (collection of poems) of Samaw'al ibn Adiya and other Jewish and Christian poets of the *Jahiliyah*. The Jews of Madinah are reputed to have established a Baitul Midras (home of learning) which survived down to Islamic times and was a centre of literary and religionistic activities.

The large vocabulary for utensils of writing in the pre-Islamic Arabic is another proof in point. The Qur'an alone has used the following words:

qalam=pen; nun=inkpot; raqq and qirtas=parchment and paper; marqum, mastur, mustatar, maktub, takhuttuhu, tumla, yumli=derivations of verbs meaning to write; kitab=amanuensis; midad=ink; kutub, suhuf, asfar, zubur — books; etc.

In short, it must have been these and similar solid foundations on which the high and lofty buildings of art and letters could rise later in Islamic times to the pride of humanity.

❖ Pre-Hijrah Islam

Islam began, as is commonly known, when the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) received his first revelation in his 40th year. There are no records to show that he ever studied the art of

⁷ Cf. my article, *The City State of Makka*.

reading and writing in his youth, and generally he is believed to have remained unlettered all through his life. Yet how interesting and inspiring it is to note that the very first revelation he received from God was a command to him and his followers to read (*iqra'*) eulogising the pen and ascribing to it all human knowledge:

“Read in the name of thy Lord, Who created, Created man from a clot. Read, and it is thy Lord, Most Bountiful Who taught by the pen, Taught man that which he knew not” (96: 1-4).

The Pen has been declared in a tradition ascribed to the Prophet⁸ to have been the first of God's creation.

We can conveniently adhere to the traditional division of the pre and post-Hijrah periods in detailing the life of the Prophet which coincide with the periods in which he did or did not wield any temporal authority as the head of a State.

It is significant that almost all the verses of the Qur'an in praise of or in connection with learning and writing belong to the Makkan period, while the Madinite verses lay greater emphasis on action and performance.

For instance:

“Are those who know equal with those who know not” (96: 4-1).

“And the knowledge ye have been vouchsafed but little” (17: 85).

⁸ Tirrnidhi, 44-88, Abu Dawud, 39 : 16; Ibn Hanbal, V. p. 315, Tayalisiy 877.

“Fear Allah alone the erudite among His bondmen”
(35: 28).

“And say: My Lord! Increase me in knowledge”
(20: 114).

“Ye were taught that which ye knew not yourselves nor did your fathers (knew) it” (6: 92).

“And if all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea, with seven more seas (added to it), were ink, the words of Allah could not be exhausted” (31: 27).

“By the Mount (Tur) and by a Scripture inscribed on parchment unrolled” (52: 1-3).

“(By) the inkpot and by the pen and that which ye write herewith” (63: 1).

“Had We sent down unto thee actual writing upon paper” (6: 7).

“Ask the people of remembrance if ye know not”
(16: 43).

These are all Makkan verses.

The purpose of raising a prophet in a nation is nothing but to teach, and hence no wonder if the Prophet remarked: “I have been raised up as a teacher (*mua'llim*)” (**Ibn Abdul Barr**, علم p.25).

This is testified to by the Qur'an in the following terms:

“(Abraham and Ishmael prayed): Our Lord! And raise up in their midst a messenger from among them who shall recite unto them Thy revelations and shall instruct

them in Scripture and in Wisdom and shall make them grow. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Mighty, Wise” (2: 129).

“He it is Who hath sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to make them grow, and to teach them the Scripture and Wisdom, though heretofore they were in error manifest” (62: 2).

“Allah verily hath shown grace to the believers by sending unto them a messenger of their own who reciteth unto them His revelations, and causeth them to grow, and teacheth them the Scripture and Wisdom, though heretofore they were in error manifest” (3: 164).

In fact preaching and teaching are the same thing, especially for one who made no distinction between Church and State and whose ideal was:

“Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in Hereafter, and guard us from the doom of Fire” (2: 201).

And as early as the 2nd covenant of Aqabah, about two years before the Hijrah, when a dozen Madinites embraced Islam, they asked the Prophet to send along with them a teacher who could teach them the Quran and instruct them in Islam and the religious rites. Naturally, teaching at this stage meant only the explanation of the rudiments of the faith and the rituals

connected therewith.

The most important thing connected with the Makkan period is that already at this early date the Prophet had scribes who took down regularly whatever was revealed to him and whose copies multiplied rapidly. We know, for instance, that when Umar embraced Islam, he had come across a copy of some of the Suras of the Qur'an in the house of his sister, who apparently could read.

Lastly, I may refer in this connection to the story of Moses, mentioned again, in a Makkan Sura (*Kahf*) who set out in quest of knowledge and had many thrilling experiences. The moral of the story is that no man, however learned he may be, knows everything, and that one must travel abroad in order to gain further knowledge and learning. In connection with travels in quest of knowledge, I may also refer to some traditions.⁹

❖ **Post-Hijrah Islam**

Instead of a chronological arrangement of the data available regarding to Madinite period, we may conveniently divide the material under several heads such as administration of schools, examinations, boarding and lodging of resident students, arrangements to teach writing and reading, teaching of foreign languages, course and syllabus of general studies, women's education, education in provinces, inspection of provincial schools, and miscellaneous.

To begin with, as we have just remarked, the Holy Prophet

⁹ P. 46. مقدمه، الدارمی

had sent a teacher to Madinah even before he himself migrated to that place. Immediately after the Hijrah, we see him, in spite of enormous preoccupations in connection with defensive and pre- cautionary measures, finding time to supervise the work of eradicating illiteracy from Madinah.

To this end he appointed Said ibn al-As to teach reading and writing; and he is reputed to write a good hand.¹⁰ The Holy Prophet was so much interested in this matter that a year and a half after his migration, when two score and more Makkans were taken prisoners by him after the victory of Badr, he asked those among them who were literate, that each one of them should teach ten children of Madinah how to write.¹¹ Ubadah ibn al-Samit says that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) appointed him a teacher in the school of *Suffah* (Madinah) for classes in writing and in Quranic studies.¹²

Suffah, literally an appurtenance of a house, was an enclosure connected with the Mosque of the Prophet in Madinah. This was set apart for the lodging of newcomers and those of the local people who were too poor to have a house of their own. This

was a regular residential school where reading, writing, Muslim law, memorising of chapters of the Qur'an, *tajwid* (how to recite the Qur'an correctly), and other Islamic sciences were taught under the direct supervision of the Prophet, who took pains to

¹⁰ استيعاب by Ibn Abdul Barr, p. 393. by Abdul Hai al-Kattaniy, 1, 48 (citing Abu Dawud).

¹¹ Kattaniy, op. cit. i. p.48, Ibn Hanbal 1, p. 247, Ibn Sa'd, 21, p. 14; روض الانف by Al-Suhailiy. II, p. 92.

¹² Kattaniy, I, p. 48, citing Abu Dawud and others.

see to the daily requirements of the boarders.¹³ The students also earned their living by working in their spare hours.¹⁴

The school of Suffah provided instruction not only for the boarders but also day-scholars and casual visitors attended it in large numbers. The number of the boarders in Suffah varied from time to time and a record shows that at one time there were seventy living in the Suffah.¹⁵

Besides the local population, batches of students from far-off tribes used to come and stay there for a while and complete their course before returning to their country.¹⁶

Often the Prophet asked some of his trained companions to accompany the tribal delegations on their return journey in order to organize education in their country and then return to Madinah.¹⁷

In the early years of Hijrah, it seems to have been the policy of the Prophet to ask all those people who embraced Islam from among the people living outside Madinah, to migrate to the proximity of the metropolis,¹⁸ where sometimes he allotted them

¹³ And share with them his daily bread.

¹⁴ Bukhari, Battle of Bir Ma'unah.

¹⁵ Ibn Hanbal III, 375.

¹⁶ Bukhari, رجة البهائم by Tabari, XI, p, 50: تفسير خازن concerning verse 9 : 122.

"And the believers shall not all go out to fight. Of every troop of them a party only shall go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion and that may warn their folk when they return to them so that they may beware (9: 122). Ibn Abdul Barr, العلم pp. 20, 21.

¹⁷ Kattaniy I, 43 ff.

¹⁸ Wensinck هجرة S, v. مفتاح كنور السنة

crown lands for colonisation.¹⁹ The military and religious reasons which might have actuated this decision are obvious. Ibn Sa'd²⁰ records, that once the Prophet sent a teacher, as usual, to a tribe recently converted to Islam. The teacher, according to the general instructions, asked the tribesmen to leave their homes and migrate to Madinah.

And he added: 'whoso does not migrate, his Islam is no Islam and he will be treated as an unbeliever.' A delegation of the tribe set out for Madinah, waited on the Prophet and was enlightened. The Prophet explained to them that if they found difficulty in leaving their country on account of landed and other vested interests. It was not at all incumbent upon them to come over to Madinah. They would nevertheless be treated just as those who had embraced Islam and had migrated to Islamic territory.

The despatch of teachers was a regular feature of the educational policy of the Prophet all through his life in Madinah. In the case of Bi'r Ma'unah, he had despatched 70 of his best Qur'an-knowers obviously because they had to deal with a vast country and a very large tribe.

The arrival of batches of students was not the less frequent. As said above, the Prophet personally took interest in the school and boarding house of Suffah where they were generally lodged.

Suffah was not the only school in Madinah. Ibn Hanbal²¹ records that at a certain time, a batch of 70 students attended the

¹⁹ Abu Dawud, ii, p. 32; and others.

²⁰ وفود ff. طبقات

²¹ III, 137.

lectures of a certain teacher in Madinah, and worked there till morning. There were at least nine mosques in Madinah even in the time of the Prophet,²² and no doubt each one of them served simultaneously as a school. The people inhabiting the locality sent their children to these local mosques. Quba is not far from Madinah. The people sometimes went there and personally supervised the school in the mosque of that places.²³ There are general dicta of the Prophet regarding those who studied in the mosque schools.²⁴ He also enjoined upon people to learn from their neighbours.²⁵

An interesting episode has been recorded by Abdullah Ibn Amr ibn al-As,²⁶ that one day the Prophet found, when he entered his mosque, two groups of people, one of them was engaged in prayer and devotional service to God, and the other in learning and teaching Fiqh. Thereupon the Prophet remarked that both the groups were doing praiseworthy things, yet the one excelled the other. As for the first, it prayed to God Who may or may not give them what they asked for at His will. As for the other, it learned and taught the ignorant. And in fact he (the Prophet) himself was raised up as a teacher (*mu'allim*) and the Prophet took his seat with this latter group.

In this connection I may also refer to the famous and oft-quoted tradition that a learned man is far harder on Satan than

²² Abu Dawud ff, عيني شرح البخاري كتاب المرسل II, 468.

²³ IbnAbdul Barr. العلم p. 97.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁵ Kattani, op. cit. I, 41.

²⁶ IbnAbdul Barr. العلم p. 25; and others.

one thousand devout ascetics together.²⁷

The Prophet also taught personally. Umar and many other prominent companions regularly attended these classes and learnt the Qur'an, etc. Sometimes the Prophet inspected the study circle in his mosque and if he found any incongruity, he at once took steps to put it right. So, al-Tirmidhi²⁸ mentions that once the Prophet heard a discussion in his mosque for and against predestination. He came out of his room and he was so angry that, in the words of the narrator, the juice of pomegranate seemed to have been poured over his cheeks and forehead. Then he forbade discussion in such matters and remarked that many a former nation went astray on account of that question.

Again, it was the decided policy of the Prophet, that only the most learned in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah should conduct the religious service²⁹ which implied the chieftainship of the place, tribe or town, and so people vied with each other in learning and passing the tests of government schools.

These attempts did not prove futile, and literacy spread so rapidly that very soon after the *Hijrah* the Qur'an could prescribe compulsory records in documents and attestation of at least two persons for every transaction on credit, however small. In the words of the Qur'an the aim of written documents was as follows:

“This is more equitable in the sight of Allah, and more sure for testimony and the best way of avoiding doubt

²⁷ Suyuti op cit. s.v. عالم and فقيه citing Bukhari and Dailami.

²⁸ شمائل in loco.

²⁹ Muslim ibn al'Hajjaj in loco.

between you.”³⁰

Obviously this could not have been enforced without a large diffusion of literacy³¹ among the inhabitants of the Muslim State. The writing down of the *wahy* (revelations), political treaties and conventions, state correspondence, enlistment of militia,³² permanent representation, especially in Makka, to inform the central government of what was going on in other countries and states, census³³ and many more such things were in those days directly connected with and necessitated the expansion of literacy. More than 200 letters of the Prophet have come down to us in history³⁴ and many more must have been lost since the Prophet ruled over a country of over a million square miles in area for a whole decade.

The Prophet was the first to introduce seals in Arabia.³⁵ His care for legibility may be gathered from his *obiter dicta*, that you must dry the ink on the paper with the use of dust before folding it,³⁶ that you must not omit the three curves of the letter (س) and not dash it with a single stroke of (س)³⁷ as it shows carelessness and laziness; that you must put the pen, during the intervals of writing, on your ear since this is more of a reminder to one who

³⁰ Quran, 2: 282.

³¹ There were also professional scribes for the use of the public. Kattani, vol. I, pp. 275-77.

³² Kattani, vol. 1, p. 221, citing Muslim.

³³ Bukhari, pp. 56 ; 181 (1).

³⁴ Cf. my "Corpus des Traites et lettres diplomatiques de l'Islam al'epoques Prophete et des Khalifes Orthodoxes".

³⁵ Kattani, I, p 177; Baladhuri, فتوح

³⁶ Kattani, I, p. 129.

³⁷ Ibid., p.125 ff.

dictates (اذكر المملى).³⁸

Already in the time of the Prophet, specialisation have developed considerably and the Prophet encouraged it. So, he has said that whoever wants to learn the Qur'an must go to such and such a person, and whoever wants to learn *tajwid*, and the mathematics of dividing a heritage and law must have recourse to such and such persons.³⁹

There are several traditions forbidding teachers to accept any remuneration,⁴⁰ which shows that it was a custom of long standing to reward the teacher. Ubadah ibn al-Samit relates that he taught the Qur'an and the art of writing in Suffah and one of the pupils presented him with a bow. The Prophet, however, commanded him not to accept the same.⁴¹

As the head of the State, the Prophet required the services of those who knew foreign languages. Zaid ibn Thabit, the chief amanuensis of the Prophet, is reputed to have learnt Persian, Greek, Ethiopian, and Aramaic.⁴² And at the express instance of the Prophet, he learnt the Hebrew script in some weeks.⁴³ It was he who wrote letters addressed to Jews and it was he who read out to the Prophet letters received from them.

The question of the course and syllabus is difficult to

³⁸ Kattani.

³⁹ Ibn Sa'd and others, in loco.

⁴⁰ Suyuti جامع الجوامع s.v. علماء citing Tabarani; Bukhari, 37, p. 16, Abu Dawud 33: 36

⁴¹ Abu Dawud II, p. 129, also cited by Shibli سيرت النبي II, P. 88.

⁴² Kattani, I, p. 202, citing Ibn Abd Rabbibi عقد الفريد and others.

⁴³ Kattani, I, p. 203; citing Bukhari and others.

pronounce upon with exactitude. From the scanty material at our disposal we come to the conclusion that no uniform course was followed everywhere. The teacher rather than the course was the main factor. Still we can glean this much of information that besides the all-embracing Qur'an and the Sunnah, the Prophet enjoined instruction in shooting (of arrows,⁴⁴) swimming⁴⁵ mathematics of dividing a heritage in the Qur'anic proportions,⁴⁶ the rudiments of medicine,⁴⁷ astronomy,⁴⁸ genealogy⁴⁹ and the practical phonetics necessary in reciting the Qur'an.⁵⁰ Again, the teacher was to be treated with respect.⁵¹

The Arabs of Makka laid great stress on purity of language and on desert life free from the vices of the cosmopolitan Makka. So, they used to send their newborn babies to various tribes in the interior of the country for several years. The Prophet himself had undergone this useful training and remembered it in his later life. It is said that the practice has not been discontinued to this day among the aristocracy of Makka. Again, as commerce was the main profession of the Makkans, young men were apprenticed to leaders of caravans.

Some distinction was made even in those early days

⁴⁴ Suyuti op. cit. S. v. *علموا* citing *ابونعيم* ويلمى، ابن مندة، ابونعيم

⁴⁵ Ibid., S. v. *علموا* citing *ابونعيم* ابن مندة، ابونعيم

⁴⁶ Ibid., s.v. *تعلموا* citing *طبرانى* and others; Ibn Abdul Barr *العلم* p. 80; Abu Dawud 18: 1; Ibn Majah, p. 23: 1.

⁴⁷ Suyuti, s.v. *تعلمن* citing Malik.

⁴⁸ Ibid., *تعلموا* citing Ibn Saniy.

⁴⁹ Ibid., s.v. *تعلموا من النساياكم* citing Malik, Tirmidhi, Tabari, Baihaqi.

⁵⁰ Ibid., s.v. *تعلموا من امر النجوم* citing Dailami.

⁵¹ Ibid., *تعلموا* citing Tabarani.

between the education of children and that of adults. Shooting and swimming were expressly enjoined upon children (*sibyan*). Again, the Prophet said that boys of seven should be taught how to take part in religious service, and should be compelled at ten if they disregarded it.⁵²

Girls were treated separately. The Prophet set apart a special day when he lectured to women exclusively and replied to their questions.⁵³ Spinning was regarded by him as their special occupation.⁵⁴ A tradition records that he asked a lady to teach the art of writing to one of his wives.⁵⁵ His wife ‘Aishah was so gifted in Fiqh and Muslim sciences besides letters, poetry and medicine⁵⁶ that the Prophet is said to have remarked that she mastered half of the human sciences. The Qur'an had also specially enjoined upon the wives of the Prophet to teach others.⁵⁷ An interesting tradition says:

“Who possesses a slave girl and teaches her and teaches her well and trains her and trains her well, and then liberates her to marry her as a regular wife, he shall have double merit.”⁵⁸

Gradually the Muslim State, which at first consisted only of a part of the city of Madinah, extended far and wide in the

⁵² Suyuti., op. cit. s.v. علموا الصبي citing Ibn Hanbal, Tirmidhi, Baghawī.

⁵³ Bukhari العلم

⁵⁴ Suyuti, s.v. علموا (نعم لهما المومنة في بيتها الغزل) citing Abu Naim, Ibn Minda.

⁵⁵ Kattani, op. cit., I, pp. 49-55; citing Abu Dawud and Qadi ‘Iyad.

⁵⁶ Shibli سيرت النبي II, p. 407; etc.

⁵⁷ Quran. 33: 34.

⁵⁸ Ibn Abdul Barr العلم p. 46.

Arabian Peninsula, and not only nomadic tribes but also settled Arabs of towns and cities embraced Islam in large numbers. The conversion to the new faith necessitated a very extensive educational service embracing the million square miles under the Muslim sway in the time of the Prophet. Teachers were sent from Madinah to important centres and the provincial governors are made responsible for the organization and control of local schools.

The long document⁵⁹ exhaustively enumerating the duties of Amr ibn Hazm as governor of Yaman has fortunately been preserved by historians in toto. It contains express instructions for the diffusion of knowledge of Muslim sciences, the Qur'an, Hadith and Fiqh. There is an interesting sentence which throws a flood of light on the distinction between religious and secular education. It runs: "And persuade⁶⁰ people to take to religious lore."

Daily ablutions, weekly baths, congregational services, yearly fasting and the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba were also to be taught by the governor-teacher.

To enhance the standard of provincial education, the Prophet appointed at least in Yaman an inspector-general of education, who was a touring officer in the various districts and provinces and looked after the schools and other educational institutions.⁶¹ Finally we may refer to the theoretical aspect of education as

⁵⁹ Ibn Hisham, p. 961-62; Tabari, Annales, p. 1727-29 I, 248-49, Suyuti.

⁶⁰ Suyuti, s.v. (علموا ولا تعفوا فان العلم خير من العف: علموا ولا تعسرو) citing Ibn Saad, Baihaqi, Ibn Hanbal.

⁶¹ Regarding governor of Makka, etc., cf. Kattani, 143 ff.

emphasized in the Qur'an and the tradition.

The Qur'an is full, from the beginning to the end, of most unequivocal and vehement denunciation of unimaginative imitation,⁶² enjoining original thinking and personal investigations. No other religious Book in the world has laid such stress on the study of nature, the sun, the moon, the tide, the approaching night, the glittering stars, the dawning day, plants and animal life, presenting them all in testimony of the laws of nature and the power of the Creator. According to the Qur'an, knowledge is unending and the whole universe is made subservient to man, the Agent of God in this world. Again one must abide by the truth and not be prejudiced by narrow notions of hereditary customs and beliefs.⁶³

In the Hadith also learning has been praised lavishly and learned people have been declared to be the best of men⁶⁴ and even the inheritors and successors of prophets.⁶⁵ Lastly, I shall refer to an oft-quoted tradition.⁶⁶ Though not universally acknowledged to be genuine in its present form of wording, yet its sense is quite in consonance with the general teaching of the

⁶² Ibn Abdul Barr. (اتخذوا حبارهم ورهبانهم من دون الله referring to ذم التقليد العلم

⁶³ مقدمة ff 31. مقدمة ابن ماجه 19. 2. 39. pp. Tirtidhi, 3. 1. 24 : pp. Abu Dawud Cf. ⁶⁴ ff 17. الدارمي

__ 17 ff مقدمة ابن ماجه — 10 : 96 : 13 : 10, 3 : Bukhari من يرد الله بخيرا يفقه في الدين ⁶⁴ مقدمة (خير الناس العلماء والمتعلمون) 17-16 pp. العلم Ibn Abdul Barr, 23-ff مقدمة دارمي 25, 31. ff. الدارمي

⁶⁵ (Bukhari, 3: 10; Tirmidhi, 39: 9; Ibn Abdul Barr, p. 21). العلماء ورثة الانبياء

⁶⁶ (Ibn Abdul Barr, اطلبوا العلم ولو كان في الصين فان طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم ومسلمة 84; p. العلم, Ibn Abdul Barr, الكامل) A Ibn Ediy, شعب الايمان, العلم, Baihaqi.

Educational System in the time of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ)

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah

Qur'an and the tradition. I mean the command: Seek knowledge even if it be in China since the seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim, man and woman.”

الهم انى اسالك علماً نافعاً ورزقاً طيباً وعملاً متقبلاً

(“O God I ask Thee for useful learning, righteous livelihood and actions accepted by Thee”)

Such was the prayer of the Prophet (ﷺ).



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